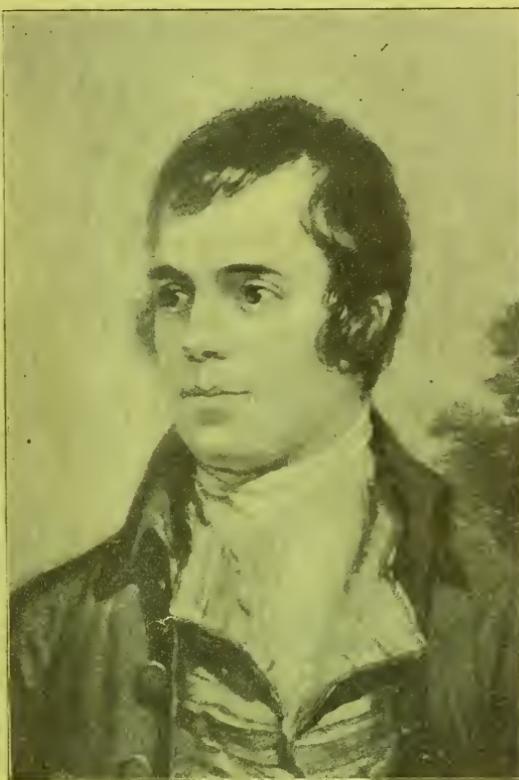


114

# ROBERT BURNS.



*Burns*

## A LECTURE.

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BY HENRY WARRUM, INDIANAPOLIS



“Should Auld Acquaintance be Forgot?”

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ROBERT BURNS,

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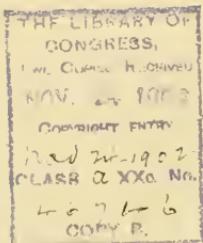
A LECTURE

—BY—

HENRY WARRUM.

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INDIANAPOLIS, INDIANA.



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## ROBERT BURNS.

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*Ladies and Gentlemen:*

Some time ago a professor of one of our Western Universities compared the genius of John D. Rockefeller with the genius of Shakespeare. As I recall the comparison, Shakespeare had none the best of it.

I mention this fact to point the tendency of modern hero-worship. The man of interest today, the man who stirs the pulse of emulation and challenges attention, is the Captain of Industry; and a lycean subject such as "Andrew Carnegie," for example,—his wealth, methods, industrial triumphs and splendid public gifts—would doubtless make a wide and popular appeal.

But I am not going to talk about Andrew Carnegie. I have chosen another Scotchman,—a man thriftless, intemperate, immoral if you insist,—a man who lived in debt and died at 37, cursing an importunate creditor. And yet this man was a benefactor of his race, and the legacy he bequeathed the world shall be treasured and enjoyed when Carnegie is forgotten and when all his gifts have perished in the oblivious dust. I do not disparage the organizing talent, the constructive genius, nor the benefactions of the great ironmaster, but merely

state a fact: In the world of human effort the material is impermanent and thought alone imperishable. And when I talk to you of this man, this improvident poet, I hope to recall the truth, too oft forgotten,—that what a man *possesses* is, after all, no measure of what he is *worth*, that one may serve the world far better than he serves himself.

## I.

Robert Burns was born January 25, 1759, near Ayr, Scotland. Taine says "it is hard to be born in Scotland." I want you to understand that. And for fear that some loyal Scotchman,—and they are all loyal,—may take exceptions to the opinion of this warm-blooded Frenchman who wore his overcoat in July in Glasgow, let me quote you what a Scotchman says. Dr. John Watson, in his lecture on "Scottish Traits," says, "The Scotchman has to plow his ground that is more stones than earth, he has to harvest his crops out of the teeth of the snow storm, three centuries of the sternest Calvinism are behind him, his life has been a continual struggle and surprise, and all these things have taught him the irony of life." In the midst of a Scottish snow storm Burns was born, and the straw thatched roof that sheltered him in a few days was blown away.

It was said, and the legend has been preserved in his own verse, that an old gipsy looked into his little hand and prophesied,

"He'll hae misfortunes great and sma',  
But ay a heart aboon them a',  
He'll be a credit to us a',  
We'll a' be proud o' Robin."

The father, who by the way, spelled his name Burnes, was a typical lowland Scot,—thrifty, sober, industrious and religious. The mother, we are told, had a fine black eye, wit, mirth, and a memory for song and with these gifts she dowered her son.

They were farmers—crofters—and the small rented farm they held lay near Alloway's auld haunted Kirk and near the bonnie Doon. Burns always kept in his heart something suggestive of this ruined church and something of this dulcie stream.

Here he lived seven years, roaming about the hills and streams and listening to his mother's songs. In the family was an old woman who had a choice collection of witch tales and she told them so well, Burns afterwards admitted, that even when a man on his nocturnal ramblings he always kept a sharp lookout around suspicious places. When the family moved to another farm at Mt. Oliphant, nearby,—a farm poorer if possible than the one at Ayr, real life began for Burns. It was here he received that schooling that the poorest Scotchman gives his child. Burns was far from being an illiterate man. Though his education was not academic, it gave him an acquaintance with the masters of English literature. He was studious, ambitious,—thoughtful to melancholy—in those days. At thirteen he was doing the work of a hand and at fifteen he was the chief laborer on the farm. It was in these years he received those impressions of nature and humanity that colored all his life. He had an observant eye, a tender heart and a sympathetic mind. He was perhaps more of the Latin than the Gaelic type. He saw and felt those things that Dr. Watson says teaches the Scot the “irony of life.”

And if Scotland so influences a native race,—what must have been its effect on this exotic heart? The wind blown moor, the misty hills, the stony fields, old ocean's melancholy waste and over all the gray and austere skies! The seasons played upon him and the long winters that he loved added to his melancholy mood.

The people, too, canny as nature and cold as Calvinism made them, the respectable classes "rigidly righteous and unco-wise,"—how alien to a soul like Burns! Here at Mt. Oliphant, he began to learn something of "man's inhumanity to man." The farm was poor, the lease was hard, and the agent, who controlled the place, was an oppressive brute. His letters, Burns has said, would often drive the family to tears. In a verse of the *Twa Dogs*, written long afterwards he has given us a picture of the brutality of this agent and the servility and degradation of the Scotch crofter:

"He'll stamp and threaten, curse and swear,  
He'll apprehend them, poind their gear,  
While they maun stand with aspect humble,  
And hear it a' and fear and tremble."

During this time, however, his poetic genius was developing. If he was sombered by the austerity of nature,—he caught her grace and beauty. All the harmony of sight and sound was his. He saw the winding Ayr, the larch bough dipping in its stream; the purple heather jewelled with the dew; the narrow winding road shadowed by trees through which the latticed sunlight fell; "the wee white cot aboon the mill," its smoke slow circling to the sky. He heard

the lavrock's morning call, the housedog's bark at night, the lazy lowing of the kine, the purl and gurgle of the brook and back of all the distant murmur of the sea. He caught the melody and grace of toil,—the sower's rhythmic sweep in Spring and Autumn's harvest song. The very fragrance of the earth was his—the perfume of the flowers, the odors from the hay, the aromatic scent of fresh-turned sod, all, gave their sensuous pleasures to this sensuous soul that gave them to the world again.

And if he found the men a trifle uncongenial he began to see that this was no fault of the women. He even fell in love with his sonsie partner of the harvest field and wrote his first song to her. This love and song were but the beginning of a career of songs and loves. It took love to open the flood gates of his melodious heart, as he afterwards explained:

"But still the elements of sang,  
In formless jumble, right and wrang,  
Wild floated through my brain;  
Till on that har'st, I said before,  
My partner in the merry core,  
She roused the forming strain."

It was during this time he came in conflict with the Church. He began to see the hard uncharitableness of Scotch Calvinism and the hypocrisy of many of its churchmen.

Of all religions, the most gloomy was that of John Calvin; but this saturnine priest made the mistake of starting his church among the gay, sympathetic and light-hearted Gauls. John Knox found a more congenial soil for the doctrines of early Presbyterianism; and yet so gloomy were these doctrines and so drastic

was the discipline of the church that it had divided, even in Burns' time, into the Auld Lights who believed that levity was a mortal sin, and the New Lights who thought a man should not be excommunicated on the uncorroborated evidence of a smile. For want of anything better and because his friends belonged to that side, Burns embraced the cause of the New Lights. This led him to write his lampoons and satires on the Auld Kirk and its "holier than thou" parsons. Of course the church retaliated and after Burns' first spree the village preachers used him as a text. I want to speak to you later of Burns' native religion, but not now. Burns went to church, sometimes. He always tried to find a shelter behind a friendly post. Sometimes he would ponder over the horror of it—"these tidings of damnation." Sometimes he caught the selfishness of the prayers like Holy Willie's:

"O thou, wha in heaven dost dwell,  
Wha, as it pleases best thyself,  
Sends ane to heaven and ten to hell;  
    A' for thy glory,  
And no for any guid or ill  
    They've done afore thee,

I bless and praise thy matchless might,  
When thousands thou hast left in night,  
That I am here afore thy sight  
    For gifts and grace,  
A burnin' an' a shinin' light  
    To a' this place."

And then, as the parson thought of Burns, or his friends,—

"Lord in the day of vengeance try him;  
Lord visit them wha did employ him;

And pass not in thy mercy by 'em,  
Nor hear their prayer;  
But, for thy people's sake, destroy 'em,  
And dinna spare.

But, Lord, remember me and mine  
Wi' mercies temporal and divine,  
That I for gear and grace may shine,  
Excell'd by name;  
And a' the glory shall be thine,  
Amen."

It reminds one of that other prayer—"Lord bless me me and my wife, my son John and his wife, us four and no more."

Sometimes he put in his time at church watching a lousie wander over a fine lady's bonnet and then he would sermonize,

"O wad some Pow'r the giftie gie us  
To see ousrels as ither see us,  
It wad frae monie a blunder free us  
And foolish notion."

Gradually this life and this society formed Burns' character. His poet's heart hungered for mirth and good fellowship and it found it among those who had forfeited the respect of this society. His soul bewildered at the darkness, like a plant, groped for light and was glad to find it even though it was the light that failed.

Burns was eighteen when the family removed again, this time to a farm at Lochlea where the struggle commenced anew. At Lochlea he began writing his songs. "Holding the plow," says his brother Gilbert, "was the favorite situation with Robert for poetical composition." Think of this Scotch farmer boy following the

plow while he dreamed those immortal songs that have filled the world with joy and tears! His genius found him, like Elisha, at the plow.

While wooing the muse he began to woo a farmer's daughter and wanted to marry her; and let me say this, that while Burns is censured for the number of his loves—he never courted one he wasn't willing and anxious to marry. But this one, like others, was unwilling to have him; and shortly after he went to the town of Irvine where he joined the Masonic order and got his first taste of congenial comradeship. In those days the Masonic lodge was not as respectable as it is now; yet it was composed of social, liberal minded men, devoted to the principles of liberty and the rights of man.

It cannot be denied that at this time and henceforth, the life of Burns was far from exemplary. He was weak but he never became corrupt. If he fell, he always struggled to his feet and tried to brush his knees. "The wit that flies the flowing can haunted his empty cup."

Just before his father died, he said that there was one of his children of whose future he could not think without fear. Robert, who was present, said "O father, it is me you mean" and burst into tears.

After the father's death, Robert, who was then twenty-five, and Gilbert, his brother, took the family to Mossiel where they rented a small farm. Here for two years he continued farming and courting and drinking and writing poetry.

Think of the work he did:

Death and Dr. Hornbrook.  
The Twa Herds.  
The Jolly Beggars.  
Halloween.  
The Cotter's Saturday Night.  
Man Was Made to Mourn.  
Address to the Deil.  
To a Mouse.  
A Winter's Night.  
Holy Willie's Prayer.  
The Holy Fair.  
The Author's Earnest Cry.  
Scottish Drink.  
The Twa Dogs.  
Address to the Unco Guid.  
To a Mountain Daisy.  
Epistle to a Young Friend.  
A Bard's Epitaph.

Such was some of the poetry he gave to the world; quaint, original, picturesque, sarcastic, tender, rollicking and didactic,—and all as full as his own heart of pathos and joy,—of love and laughter. It was at this time that this passionate and impulsive youth fell in love with Jean Armour. It was an unfortunate affair. He gave Jean a written acknowledgment of marriage which was perfectly legal and which was the only shield he could throw between her and shame; but her father wrathfully tore it up and forbade the daughter to have more to do with Burns. She obeyed; and in the con-

troversy I think Burns appeared in a better light than either of the others.

Later he married Jean. It seems to me that in this unhappy matter, Burns acted a nobler part than many poets whose follies are tenderly forgiven and forgotten, a manlier part than many men whose epitaphs are eloquent of their honor.

About the time that Armour forbade Burns' marriage with his daughter, he met one of those women whose love sanctifies a man. To a man, not wholly bad but weak, there is always some good and guardian soul to save him, if not from his sins, at least from their corruption.

Over the redeemed Faust rose the triumphant chorus—

“Das ewig weibliche zieht uns hinan.”

The eternal womanly that drew Burns up, he found in Mary Campbell—Highland Mary. She was a servant in the house of Gavin Hamilton, one of Burns' friends; a bonnie, sweet, pure hearted Scotch maiden and Burns loved her with a sublimated and spiritual love. They pledged their troth in poetic style with hands clasped across the winding Ayr! A short time after, Burns was temporarily called away and before his return, Highland Mary had taken sick and died. The wound in his poet's heart never healed. Years afterwards, on the anniversary eve of this betrothal, Burns, obsessed with grief, betook himself to the field and through the long, cold watches of that October night he sat, thinking of Mary Campbell. They found him at the morning and led him home and he sat down and wrote his deathless song “To Mary in Heaven.”

Beside the Beatrice of Dante and the Laura of Petrarch, among those names made luminous forever by lyric love,—those names that constitute its sweet and holy litany, the genius of this ploughman has placed his Highland Mary.

Shortly after his rupture with the Armours, Burns published a volume of his poems and it brought him some fame and twenty pounds. Edinburg society on the lookout for new sensations made him its lion for a brief season. It soon tired of him, however, and we can easily believe he tired of it. This experience with society was a failure. It did him no good. He became acquainted with some fashionable women with whom he carried on an extensive correspondence. They, like all the educated classes of Edinburg, affected the French literary style; Burns imitated them and the result was that these letters are the most unworthy things he did. It was not until this son of Earth returned to Nature that he found his strength, Antaean like, renewed.

About this time he made a trip through the Highlands, a trip which yielded nothing. Wordsworth a few years later made this same tour and left its memorials in splendid verse; but Burns was not the poet of grand scenes. He had no language for the mountain, no apostrophe for the sea. He was the poet of the lowly. The daisy touched him to tears.

At the age of twenty-nine Burns married Jean Armour and leased a farm at Ellisland, near Dumfries. It was characteristic that he passed by several fertile places he might have had to get this farm—a poor one, of hard clay soil, but rich in scenery. He was laughed at. It was another of his follies, and in a few

years he failed. But a subtle instinct may have told Burns that his real business was to cultivate something besides farming, something in which scenery counted more than soil.

During his stay at Ellisland he was appointed an excise officer, and here for three years he continued farming, looking after smugglers and writing occasional poems like "Tam O'Shanter" and "To Mary in Heaven." Then at the age of thirty-two he moved to Dumfries where he lived until the end. The business of exciseman was not congenial to a man like Burns. He made a poor tax gatherer, especially on illicit liquors. He probably thought whiskey ought to be free from taxation;

"Freedom and Whiskey gang thegither."

Years before, he had written a satirical appeal to the Scotch members of Parliament to have the tax on whiskey raised. He wanted "to get auld Scotland back her kettle." "Tell the Premier of our thirst," he said. There are many characteristic stories told how, whenever he was directed to search the home of some old woman suspected of moonshining, he would send her word of his intended visit. Of course after he got there he made a zealous search. This residence at Dumfries was the bitterest period of Burns' life. He was neglected by the canny Scotch—shunned by those whose children built a stately monument to him. And at this time he gave the world that forgot him that hymn of fraternal love—"Auld Lang Syne." Think of it! It suggests Mrs. Browning's noble protest at the grave of Cowper,

"O men, this man in brotherhood your weary paths beguiling,  
Groaned only while he taught you peace, and died while ye were  
smiling."

He was frowned on because he sympathized with the French Revolution. Dumfries thought him unpatriotic and at this time he was writing "Bannockburn"—this paean to Scotch valor—the national anthem of the lowland Scotch. It reminds one of the Highland poet, Campbell and the search the Edinburg sheriff made of his trunk for treasonable papers. They found "Ye Mariners of England" and made it their national sea song.

Burns never did admire King George. He called his line "an idiot race"; but as the author of "Bannockburn" he was certainly entitled to the affectionate confidence of his countrymen. Some one has said that "Lowland Scotland as a nationality came in with two warriors and went out with two poets;" that "Wallace and Bruce made its history, and Burns and Scott told its story and sung its song." Burns with all his alien and exotic temperament was a passionate lover of his native land. "The tide of Scottish prejudice," he declared, "had been poured in his veins and would boil there till the flood gates shut in eternal rest."

Think of this Scotchman kissing the grave of Bruce, haunting the Leglen wood made sacred by the feet of Wallace, kneeling and praying for Scotland as he crosses the Tweed and, with a poet's fond and foolish devotion, sparing the thistle as he cuts the weeds:

"A wish (how well I mind its power),  
A wish that to my latest hour  
Will strongly heave my breast:

That I for poor Auld Scotland's sake  
Some usefu' plan or book could make,  
Or sing a sang at least.  
The rough burr thistle growing wide  
Amang the bearded bear,  
I turned the weeder clips aside  
And spared the symbol dear."

At Dumfries Burns lived some five years in poverty yet giving the world the treasures of his soul, shunned by the society that sung his songs, battling with temptation and generally yielding to it, until at the age of thirty-seven, when most men begin to live and when many begin to make their reputation, tired with the struggle and weary of the burden, this poet's soul passed from the judgment of Calvinistic Scotland and made its "appeal to time."

The surroundings of a man's birth give no presage of his future. The burial of a man is not always commensurate with his career or services to mankind. The world in time finds the graves of its dead heroes and builds its monuments over their sacred dust,—but if a genius, a hero, a benefactor of his race, does not want that monument to wait he had better leave estate enough to pay for its erection.

About the time of Burns' death, a contemporary of his, who, like him, had tried to make men happier, who had tried to flood with melody the earth he found discordant,—a young man, too, whose name means music and whose memory is a harmony,—Wolfgang Mozart, died shunned by society and his poor mortality was given to a pauper's grave.

Burns and Mozart! They have "joined the choir invisible whose music is the gladness of the world."

Much has been said of Burns' intemperance. Well.

he drank; and when he commenced drinking he didn't allow business to interfere with pleasure. Yet no man regretted his weakness more than he did; and, in my judgment, the reason so much is known of his excesses is because he admitted them. This tender and unselfish man was willing to make his life a chart that those who sailed such seas might see the most pathetic shipwreck on the shores of time. It was an age of hard drinking and, as Alexander Smith says, "if he sinned in this respect, he sinned in company with English prime ministers, Scotch Lords of Sessions, grave dignitaries of the Church and thousands of ordinary blockheads who went to their graves in the odor of sanctity."

Much has been made of the facility with which Burns turned from one love to another. Well, Mrs. Atherton in her romantic biography of Alexander Hamilton, commenting on his love affairs, says: "To expect a man of Hamilton's order of genius to keep faith with one woman for a life time would be as reasonable as to look for such genius without the transcendent passions which are its furnace."

Surely if this aristocratic statesman and man of affairs is entitled to this spirited defense at the hands of a woman, I may be permitted to ask, at least, the indulgence of your pity for poor Burns. If ever a man had genius and passions it was Burns. Few men ever fought a harder fight with the wild pack that haunts the highways of the will. He would shake them off only to fall again under their mad rush. And how Burns tried to explain all this—

"O ye douce folk, that live by rule,  
Grave, tideless blooded, calm and cool,  
Compared with you—O fool, fool, fool,

How much unlike!  
Your hearts are just a standing pool  
Your lives a dyke."

He knew. He had felt his will grow palsied and infirm under the rising thirst. He had felt the suffocating breath of mad desire, followed by reason's vertigo and all the wild delirium of the soul. He knew the currents of the blood, the tides that rise, the unconscious cerebration that grows into the maelstrom,

"He felt the force,  
The treacherous undertow and stress  
Of wayward passions and no less  
The vain remorse."

Burns sounded all of passion's depths and shoals. He has deified it in a prayer and crucified it with an epigram. In Passion's royal court he sat at times its sceptered king and then again he was its fool, the motley buffet of its gibes and scorn. He loved all womankind from Clarida to Mary Morrison and from Highland Mary to the "lass that made his bed." He wrote songs to Jennie and Molly and Eppie and Peggy and Eliza and Bessie and Nannie and Jessie and Phillis and Chloris and the lassie with the lint white locks and the lovely lass of Inverness and the bonnie lass of Albany; and then he wrote one song dedicated to them all:

"Auld nature swears, the lovely dears  
Her noblest work she classes, O;  
Her prentice han' she tried on man  
And then she made the lasses, O."

Ladies, before you pass judgment on Burns, remember his gallant love for your sex, remember the grac-

ious things he said about you, remember that he wrote the songs you sing when your hearts are running over. Poor Burns first sang them as he followed his plow;—true, the songs of a vagrant heart, but songs that have filled the world with melody.

Gentlemen, before you make up your final estimate of this man, remember what he did for you. Remember his immortal verses on human equality,—lines that shall last and be lovingly quoted while pride of honest worth endures. Remember how this farmer in deathless rhyme knit up the frayed and broken bonds of brotherhood. Wherever English speaking men foregather in social or fraternal mood, *Auld Lang Syne* is sung as the *Nunc Dimittis* of their Love.

## II.

I have said this much of his career and character because it was proper to say it in any lecture on Robert Burns. While the question with a man like this is what he did, not for himself, but for the world; still I have no patience with those who laugh and cry over his songs and treat his life and character like a soiled and dirty rag.

Burns would not have made a very creditable figure in Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress. I admit it. He would not have found congenial the companionship of Great-Heart and Valiant-for-Truth. In that allegory he would probably have been called Mr. Easy Mark. Still if he had not attained Beulah Land he would have made the

way happier and brighter and easier for those who did.

However, I want to talk to you now about the poet rather than the man,—about his genius rather than his life. I have said he was the poet of the lowly. His world was a microcosm but within it he was supreme. He was the master genre poet of all time. He saw the beauty of the rustic scene, felt the glory of homely toil and realized the art that lies unheeded in the common things of life. The country roadway, field and ingle-side grew eloquent, transfigured, as they spoke to him and through him of the mingled joy and pathos of existence. When he wrote of village life you saw the drouthy neighbors gathering at the inn. And when he sang the sylvan scene you caught the scent of hawthorn and heard the linnet's strain. And yet over all,—over the jocund billie and over the joyous bird, fell the shadow without which the picture were untrue.

Burns started to write a tragedy at one time and quit because he felt unequal to the task. And yet he wrote tragedies. When his plow destroyed the nest of the field mouse,—when he saw the wounded hare limp by,—when he crushed the modest daisy, crushed and gave it amaranthine life;—these were all tragedies to him. And how he has moved the world with their griefs! Therein lay his genius. This is a hard world. Men have so little pity that they seldom make drafts upon it, or allow others to draw upon it. But Burns, when he wants to take your heart, does not assault and storm it but approaches it by the method of parallels. Before you know it you have run up the white flag. Why should we care if a mouse's nest has cost many a weary nibble? Burns makes us care:

“Oh mousie, thou art no thy lane,  
In proving foresight to be vain;  
The best laid schemes of mice and men  
Gang aft agley,  
And leave us naught but grief and pain  
For promised joy.”

Burns' pity was transcendent. It embraced even the silly sheep and ourie cattle. Through the winter nights, he lay awake and thought of them. His pet ewe died and Burns fashioned a dying song for her. He knew the idea was absurd and he tried to make it appear a mere droll conceit, but through the lines one still sees the big round tears and hears his childish sobs. He wrote a New Year's Address to his Old Mare Maggie, in which he recounted their common trials and promised her a fallow age. Such a man was bound to be a business failure,—but these failures have glorified the world.

He had a Christ-like charity for man,—a pity like Gautama's for the beast.

He was a poet fablist—a moralist. Like the Exile of Arden he found sermons in everything. I have spoken of his satires on the church. Let me tell you, he wrote them because he was at heart a most religious man, because he did not want to see religion made the cloak for hypocrisy, or the excuse for a selfish creed.

Scotland was under a theological cloud. Her people thought they were in the redeeming light of religion. They were lost in the gloom of a heartless and uncharitable creed. Burns saw the cruelty of the dogma, the hypocrisy of the clergy, the absurd pretensions of the Presbytery, the ignorance which was proof against even the subtlety of David Hume, and he wrote those delicious satires, *The Twa Herds* and *Holy Willie's*

Prayer. A smile stole over sombre Scotland. The cloud began to break.

He was tolerant of everything but cant; he forgave everything but hypocrisy. He hated that. The white-washed rottenness of some of the church pillars challenged his wrath.

“God knows, I’m not the thing I should be,  
Nor am I even the thing I could be,  
But twenty times I rather would be  
    An Atheist clean,  
Than under gospel colors hid be  
    Just for a screen.”

And in his epistle to a young friend :

“The fear o’ hell’s a hangman’s whip,  
    To keep the wretch in order;  
But where you feel your honor grip,  
    Let that aye be your border.”

And again :

“The great Creator to revere,  
    Must still become the creature;  
But still the preaching cant forbear  
    And even the rigid feature.”

He thought religion ought to be pleasant and the world has come to his way of thinking. He was not irreligious. He had in his heart the essence of religion,—love and charity for fellow man. The world of letters does not contain a sublimer picture of religious devotion than his picture of the fireside worship in the Cotter’s Saturday Night.

At bottom Burns was a most sober minded man. He may have lived like Epicurus, but he thought like Zeno. He was willing even that his epitaph should speak his faults in order that they might point the moral that

"Prudent, cautious self-control  
Is wisdom's root."

His Epistle to a Young Friend is one of the finest pieces of poetic advice ever written. The worldly counsel of Polonius to his son sounds cold beside it.

"The sacred lowe o' weel-placed love  
Luxuriantly indulge it;  
But never tempt th' illicit rove,  
Tho' naething should divulge it;  
I wave the quantum o' the sin,  
The hazard o' concealing;  
But Och! it hardens a' within,  
And petrifies the feeling!

To catch dame Fortune's golden smile  
Assiduous wait upon her;  
And gather gear by ev'ry wile  
That's justify'd by honor;  
Not for to hide it in a hedge,  
Not for a train attendant;  
But for the glorious privilege  
Of being independent."

Every young man ought to write this entire poem in his heart. And remember, Burns wrote it out of his heart at the age of twenty-seven.

But if Burns was effective in his wisdom he was irresistible in his humor. Take Tam O'Shanter, written in one day and said to be the best day's work done in Scotland since the battle of Bannockburn. Tam O'Shanter is one of the most exquisite tales in literature. How Burns painted the picture with a few artistic touches! You see the old Scotch village with its narrow winding streets, the quiet tavern where Tam and the Shoemaker realized on life;—Tam, drunk from November to October—a roaring, drunken blellion. And for fear his hero might lose your sympathy you are given a momentary

glance at the *deus ex machina*—the virtuous Kate at home,

“Gathering her brows like gathering storm,  
Nursing her wrath to keep it warm.”

You get a momentary glance, I say, but it is enough. You begin to see why Tam drinks and stays out late at night and feeling certain that his punishment awaits him, you give the drunken blellion your sympathy. Your heart goes back to him on that evening when like bees “the minutes winged their way wi’ pleasure.”

And here occurs one of those touches of vagrant poetic moralizing for which Burns is *sui generis*:

“But pleasures are like poppies spread,  
You seize the stalk, the bloom is shed.”

The hour approaches Tam must ride. Midnight, and one of those nights that a child could see the devil was out for business. The clouds are gathering, the wind whistles through the trees,

“The lightnings flash from pole to pole,  
Near and more near the thunders roll.”

It is awful and with a skill that a modern symbolist might envy, poor Tam is brought nearer and nearer his fate through a *mis en scène* of accumulating horrors. Now they pass the ford where the peddler drowned, now the big stone where drunken Charlie broke his neck, now where the hunters found the murdered child and now where Mungo’s mother hung herself, all the while Tam singing old Scotch songs and,

"Glowering round wi' prudent cares,  
Lest bogles catch him unawares."

All at once old Maggie, the mare, pulls up before Alloways auld haunted kirk. The witches Sabbath dance was going on. Through the ruined walls the sheeted dead were seen with candles in their skeleton hands, old Nick was fiddling in a window seat and a lot of old crones were

"in a dance;  
No cotillion brent new frae Franche,  
But hornpipes, jigs, strathspeys and reels  
Put life and mettle in their heels."

A lesser artist would have had Tam frightened. Burns knew better. He had himself an acquaintance with "inspiring bold John Barleycorn"—

"Wi' tippenny we' fear nae evil,  
Wi' usquebae we'll face the devil!"

So Tam pushed up in drunken surprise and amusement and watched these old hags dancing in their shirts. It ought to have turned his stomach, Burns says,—they were so old and lean. But Tam knew what was what. There was one quite plump and good looking and how she could fling herself in her abbreviated sark! Tam looked on with open mouth and eyes until she made a fling just to his taste—one he had probably been waiting for. It was too much; he yelled,

"Weel done, Cutty sark!  
And in an instant all was dark:  
And scarcely had he Maggie rallied  
When out the hellish legion sallied.

Ah, Tam! ah, Tam! thou'll get thy fairin!  
In hell they'll roast thee like a herrin!  
In vain thy Kate awaits thy comin!  
Kate soon will be a woeful woman!  
Now, do thy speedy utmost, Meg,  
And win the key-stane of the brig;  
There at them thou thy tail may toss,  
A running stream they darena cross.  
But ere the key-stane she could make,  
The fient a tail she had to shake!  
For Nanie, far above the rest,  
Hard upon noble Maggie prest,  
And flew at Tam wi' furious ettle;  
But little wist she Maggie's mettle—  
Ae spring brought off her master's hale,  
But left behind her ain gray tail;  
The carlin caught her by the rump,  
And left poor Maggie scarce a stump."

But Burns was not only humorous. He was witty. He was a master of epigram and his satires stung like scorpions! He was a magician of words. They gave life or death. They withered, or glorified. For instance, in the *Twa Dogs*, where Caesar the gentry dog tells the crofter dog about the aristocracy, how they had even grown tired of native pleasures and were gone about the world, like our *Four Hundred*, hunting new sensations. He remembers some of them had gone to Madrid to try bull fighting. But he doesn't say so. The old dog says they've gone to Spain to fight with cattle. Even the sober Scotchman must have burst into laughter at this idea of his laird fighting a cow.

He had the art of suggesting much by saying little. M'Pherson was a Highlander who had been executed by the authorities, and Burns wrote a song called M'Pherson's farewell. This was the chorus:—

“Sae rantingly, sae wantonly,  
Sae dauntingly gaed he;  
He play'd a spring and danc'd it round  
Below the gallows tree.”

What a shadow picture—what a silhouette of Highland bravado!

Where can you find a healthier motto for a young woman than this:

“The way to me lies through the Kirk;  
Young man, do you hear that?”

Where will you find a grander passage than this:

“Or Job's pathetic plaint, and wailing cry,  
Or rapt Isaiah's wild seraphic fire.”

Or take this verse:

“To make a happy fireside clime  
To weans and wife,  
Is the true pathos and sublime  
Of human life.”

In those four lines is gathered up the best and last philosophy of life. And remember, Burns wrote his poems spontaneously like men write letters; many of them were letters; some again were penciled on windows and over fireplaces and on the blank leaves of books; toasts and repartee at drinking bouts; impromptus at church and in court; extempores to women; and addresses to the toothache and the devil. And all of most expressive words, of perfect rhythm and full of that shrewd common sense with which the genius of Scotland endowed her favorite son.

But it was in his songs that Burns excelled. In this

field he was the nonpareil of poets. Of course his songs were love songs. All songs are. 'Hatred cannot be melodious. Love is the wing of melody.' All the music of nature is born of the affections. Burns sounded all the gamut,—devotion to his fatherland, love of man for fellow and the sublimer passion born of sex.

The air of Scotland was full of songs. There had been Ferguson and Ramsey and Lady Grizell and all that mass of ballads that had been handed down from generation to generation like their speech. Wherever nature is sombre or man sad, the heart gushes forth in song. The harp suggests the willow! Think of the folk songs of Ireland and Scotland and of Germany where the mind is sober and the imagination tinged with melancholy. The ballad belongs to nature—to primitive culture. Civilization has the music of counterpoint.

Many of these Scotch songs were rough and coarse and Burns purified them. He knew the airs—the notes, and these old airs in formless jumble floated through his brain until he freighted them with new sentiment and gave them to the world. Strange to say, he did not fit music to his words, but fitted his words to the music. Yet, instead of being awkward in construction, or forced in sentiment, they were perfect. Think of the number he wrote! More than two hundred, many of them still sung.

Mirth still finds expression in "Duncan Gray." Sorrow still finds utterance in the "Banks of Doon," or "Highland Mary." Brotherly love still chants its "Auld Lang Syne." What maiden's heart, touched with the pleasure of a first beau, has not caroled its joy in "Coming Through the Rye?" What woman's soul fraught with

the pathos of a great love has not found peace in singing

“Flow gently, sweet Afton, among thy green braes?”

Scott said that Burns’ “Farewell to Nancy” contains the essence of a thousand love snogs—

“Had we never loved sae kindly,  
Had we never loved sae blindly,  
Never met—or never parted,  
We had ne'er been broken-hearted.”

You remember that celebrated passage in one of Shakespeare’s sonnets—

“Love is not love  
Which alters when it alteration finds.”

Col. Ingersoll declared that the sublimest declaration in literature. It may be; but it seems to me that the language of love ought to be simple, and against this sonnet, against this Shakesperean definition of love’s constancy, I will put Burns’ little song. “John Anderson, My Jo.” Let me read it to you, and remember, “My jo” means “my sweetheart.” I want no better fate than to grow old with a wife who can sing this song to me:

“John Anderson, my jo, John  
When we were first acquent,  
Your locks were like the raven,  
Your bonnie brow was brent;  
But now your brow is beld, John,  
Your locks are like the snaw,  
But blessings on your frosty pow,  
John Anderson, my jo.

John Anderson, my jo, John,  
We clamb the hill thegither;  
And monie a canty day, John,  
We've had wi' ane anither;  
Now we maun totter down, John,  
But hand in hand we'll go,  
And sleep thegither at the foot,  
John Anderson, my jo."

Such is but a poor review of the work of Robert Burns.

I have said the world he pictured was a small one. It was. But he drew it true to nature and limned it in her colors. The genius of an artist is not measured by the size of his canvas.

His farmers were not picturesque shepherds. His lassies were not of the Sevres bric-a-brac style. He did not call them Sylvanders and Phoebes, and give them pipes to play and a green sward on which to trip Arcadian dances. He called them by the homely names he knew and though they loved and sang and danced and played Halloween games, they labored and sorrowed. They were men and women.

Burns was not one of those who came up from the common people. He will always be lovingly remembered as one of them. Why, the plain people call him "Bobbie Burns" to show their love for him,—in an effort to caress his memory. In that loving and familiar "Bobbie" is treasured up the testimony of a comradeship unspoilt by pride of intellect — the glow of fellowship that Genius could not chill. Think of saying "Bobbie" Browning! What would the intellectual aristocracy say to that?

Burns never wrote a lengthy poem. He was not a professional literary man. He wrote as the moment inspired, and his longest works were written almost at

a sitting. He dealt in episodes not epopees, but he made those episodes like drops of dew reflect a world.

Burns is charged with coarseness. His language is not always chaste perhaps, but it is never unhealthy. When he uses a word not *comme il faut*,—"it is to laugh," as the Frenchman says; and laughter is the disinfector of corruption. No one need fear taint from this great soul. There are people who see danger in everything—who see in every reference to love the microbe of pollution. I read not long ago of a female seminary that had placed Longfellow under the ban of their Index Expurgatorius, because in his great poem—"The Building of the Ship"—he had called the ship a bride and invoked old Ocean to take her to his loving arms. And then there are those who revel in writers like Mendes and D'Annuncio and drink their toxicants because it is served with rose leaves floating on it and proffered in gilded cups, and then shrug their shoulders at our Scotchman who never uttered a note however rude that had not in it the innocence and health of elemental nature.

Show me the man or woman who loves and appreciates Robert Burns and I will show you a man or woman with a clear head, a tender heart and a soul that shall not be cast out.

He had the brain and heart of the true poet,—that is to say, the brain of a philosopher and the simple, candid and impulsive heart of a child. He was a man of many moods; and he passed from sunshine to shadow like an April day. He had the gloom of Aeschylus and mirth of Aristophanes, the sad philosophy of Rousseau and the mocking humor of Rabelais.

He found the Scotch literati imbued with French

conceptions, taste and style. He gave them a literature of local color and of national character.

He made his dialect a classic tongue.

He found Scotch song impure and made it the vehicle of the tenderest passion. His sublime words have enriched the language of love—they have taken their place forever in the rituals of our fraternities.

He was a prodigy. He lived in the dawn of Revolution and was the supreme poet of Equality and Fraternity. Looking back through the century just gone, the gentlest, noblest figure of that twilight hour when Liberty's gates swung open like the gates of morning, is this Scotchman farmer-poet, his hands upon his plow and on his lyric lips Democracy's grand song.

He did not try to magnify the great, nor paint the picturesque. He glorified the lowly. He gave toil its paeans and poverty its psalms. His verse was for the common man,—for lusty youth afield, or for the ingle-side of age.

Burns never became a fad. The dilettantes of literature never made him a cult. He was too luminous for criticism to thrive on. He indulged in no mysteries and therefore had no initiates. His thought was vigorous as nature and his language lucid as the morn.

He was not a Shakespeare nor a Byron;—he did not come as an Apollo, crowned with Parnassian laurel. He swept no lyre strung with the Muses' golden hair. He did not invoke the voluptuous pleasures or swell the august sorrows of Earth's elect. He was the Pan of poets, and like the sylvan god, he took a reed, his peasant speech, and with it charmed a world, and its compass gathered all the elemental griefs and joys, tears and smiles, sobs and laughter of the race.

## III.

Burns was an artist of the highest type. He had a message for the world. In his great work—"What is Art," Tolstoi says there are three elements of art:—the significance of the emotion sought to be transmitted; the clearness of its transmission; and the sincerity of the artist. And as the great Slav says, the highest function of art is to transmit some noble emotion. Few poets meet these requirements like Burns. I have spoken to you of his clearness and sincerity. Let me tell you of his message:

It was brotherhood.

He was one of the world's great democrats. He believed in the equality of men, that "a' men are brithers." He lived in the days of the American and French revolutions and he shared their principles. Those principles were not popular in Scotland then. They were bad form; but Burns cared little for form. On one occasion he gave this toast, "Here's to the last chapter of the Book of Kings." And another time, when some one proposed the health of William Pitt, Burns got up and said—"Here's to a better man—George Washington."

He saw the folly of inherited rank—of class distinctions. He had the perspective of genius, and like all the contemplative great he saw thro' and beneath the artificial rank secured by force, or fraud, and sanctified by time, the fundamental kinship and equality of man. Beneath the guinea's stamp of rank he saw the gold of manhood and he saw further that even that stamp did not make bad metal good coin:

"A prince can make a belted knight,  
A marquis, duke and a' that;  
But an honest man's aboon his might,  
Guid faith he mauna fa' that."

I do not believe any song was ever written that has served mankind better than this simple song of Burns. The Marseillaise may have recreated France, but France was recreated for the bourgeoisie, not for her workers; and besides, the Marseillaise that hymned her Revolution served as the war song of her Empire and sang her legions through the capitals of Europe. "For a' that" never nerved an arm to bloody strife but it has brought solace and high resolve to a million hearts: —it is the sober "Ca Ira" of the Anglo-Saxon Proletariat.

Shelley was an iconoclast and an abstract humanitarian but his message was too metaphysical to be understood by those who needed understanding.

Coleridge dreamed at one time of a pantisocracy on the banks of our Susquehanna, but Coleridge soon became a Conservative and left no glad tidings for the bewildered toiler.

Southey dreamed a while with Coleridge of a new order and then became the poet laureate of the old.

Wordsworth, who loved liberty and justice, could only stir society from the top.

Byron has been called "the greatest modern preacher of liberty, equality and fraternity." He poured forth his poet's lamentation at the grave of classic liberty, and in Missolonghi's fevered swamps he gave his life for her renascence. But Byron had no word for those who constitute society's multitude and base,—the Fourth Estate.

Even Shakespeare, who is thought to have made himself the organ of every class and type—Shakespeare was an inspiration to the submerged only in the dubious example of his own career. Coming from the people, he despised them. Though “the intellectual crown of the earth” he believed in the divinity that hedges kings, put all his eloquence in the mouths of the elect, make clowns of his poor and in his heartless caricature of Jack Cade’s mob, fixed in a lingering crucifixion, the hopes, ambitions and pretensions of the common man.

Robert Burns gave him a song to sing that he does sing and will sing until he finally conquers justice:

“What tho’ on hamely fare we dine,  
Wear odden grey and a’ that;  
Give fools their silks, and knaves their wine,  
A man’s a man for a’ that.

For a’ that and a’ that,  
Their tinsel show and a’ that;  
The honest man, tho’ e'er sae poor,  
Is King of men for a’ that.

And then that sublime envoy—

For a’ that, and a’ that,  
It’s coming yet, for a’ that,  
That man to man, the world o'er,  
Shall brothers be, for a’ that.”

It is coming yet; but it is not yet come. We are too apt to confuse democracy with the laws intended to safeguard it. We think democracy means the elective franchise, the right to the writ of habeas corpus, trial by jury and representative government. There is no greater mistake. The English have these rights. We have them; and yet neither in England nor in America is

democracy triumphant. The political side of democracy is but one phase of it. Back of that must be a social democracy, and back of that again must be an industrial democracy.

How is it to-day? We have our aristocracy, our bourgeoisie, our proletariat, the lines clearly drawn. We have the word, not the spirit. All citizens are supposed to enjoy the forms of equality before the law;—are they even supposed to stand equal before the bar of life? You may say they have equal opportunities and the one who attains power simply reaps the reward of his superior shrewdness, ability, or skill. But that is not democracy. That is simply a state of nature, where the law of evolution prevails and the fittest survive. Society itself is a protest against that policy; for in the development of the human race along the lines of natural evolution, the better man would go down before the stronger; the unselfish man before the selfish; and the moral faculties would in time become atrophied from disuse.

This great and tender soul could not understand the cruelty of economic strife; it seemed to him as passionate as the primeval war of tooth and break and claw. He saw the glory of the battlefield but all its slain; the feudal pomp of wealth but all its fettered spoil. He saw men broken in the fratricidal struggle,—tossed about like the flotsam of a wreck, or sunken like its jetsam. He saw labor produce the wealth it did not enjoy—struggling for existence—damned like Tantalus—under the curse and spell that Lassalle called “the iron law of wages.” He saw, as Mrs. Browning saw, the children of poverty and toil, children of the mine and factory, slaves to the machine, he saw them

“weeping ere the sorrow comes with years.” He saw, with Hood, the poor woman of the sweat shop and the attic, that slave to the needle, the woman who sews and waits for Death as patiently as Penelope wove and waited for her Love; he saw her “sewing at once with a double thread, a shroud as well as a shirt”; he saw these things and he cried aloud

“Man’s inhumanity to man  
Makes countless millions mourn.”

His dream is not yet realized; yet many believe, or profess to believe, that we have found democracy’s consummation in economic individualism,—in the competition of modern industrial life.

“Hands off business activities,” says a brilliant statesman. ‘A free field and a fair fight,’ says another. A free field and a fair fight never produced anything but war, brigandage, feudalism, pauperism, crime and inhumanity; it develops bandits and speculators, chevaliers of industry and gamblers on the change,—Dick Turpins and Jim Fiskes. And if peace and order do come at last under the system of *laissez faire*, they come with a Napoleon or a Morgan, and it is the peace and order of a regnant autocracy and a prostrate people.

If business should be left to the operation of nature’s law of evolution, why are statutes enacted against swindling and robbery, against the strong arm and lying tongue? Society has, or should have, its own laws of evolution and they should be such that under their operation, the virtues would survive, and justice, love, charity and honor would be developed.

Society was never organized that a shrewd and skill-

ful few might exploit the wants and weaknesses of the many. Its true philosophy lies in lifting the mass, even though to do so may retard the progress of some sporadic genius. And so democracy means the diffusion of power among the people.

The ballot is power, and we try by all the sanction of law and influence of public sentiment to preserve for all the equality and sanctity of that suffrage.

Knowledge is power, and every little red school house is a witness to our effort to scatter that power and keep it scattered among the masses. Law can go no further than we have made it go to preserve the equality of education.

Wealth, too, and perhaps above all else, is power; but in the matter and manner of producing and distributing wealth we plant ourselves on the doctrine of *laissez faire*, the method of the jungle,—

“The good old rule, the simple plan,  
That he may take who has the power,  
And he may keep who can.”

Burns saw this and it appeared to him unjust. Even when he got his little salary as exciseman, fifty pounds a year, he reproached himself with the question

“But why should one man better fare,  
And a' men brothers?”

Of course Burns was in advance of his time,—of this time, perhaps of all time. He was an idealist, and ideals are never realized. But it is the struggle towards the unattainable that glorifies humanity. There is something at once pathetic and noble in that struggle. Men

crush the idealist and then push on in the way he pointed out. The religion they crucified and the philosophy that drank their hemlock become the guide and conduct of their lives. The democracy of which Burns dreamed may be visionary, but thousands believe it and all are consciously or unconsciously struggling towards it. In its promise millions find that peace that cometh from a sacrifice believed not wholly vain. As the sick of heart turn to the Gospels, so the dispossessed of earth have found solace with this Scottish plowman,—the poor whom the sister poet saw, the patient poor

“Who sang by turns  
The psalms of David and the songs of Burns.”

He was a laborer and he gave a message to labor. He believed in its dignity and recognized its degradation. He saw it despised, servile, hat in hand. He saw the strut of wealth and aristocracy's cold stare. But he was not misled. He saw that those who toiled were to that aristocracy what the roots and stalk are to the flower; that the hand that

“Guides the plow  
Gives that fine pallor to my lady's brow.”

He saw the old tragedy of Gerar re-enacted,—the birthright traded for a mess of pottage. He saw the petted favorite of fortune impose on blind authority and take the blessing, too. He felt the injustice which time can not cure nor all the glory of the civilization founded on it can palliate. He heard again the bitter cry of the disinherited—“bless me, even me also.” He saw it scorned.

He saw the unspeakable outrage of labor asking society for employment and finding none. He protested:—

“See yonder poor, o'er labored wight,  
So abject, mean and vile,  
He begs a brother of the earth  
To give him leave to toil;  
And see his lordly fellow-worm  
The poor petition spurn,  
Unmindful, tho' a weeping wife  
And helpless offspring mourn.”

I once heard a great labor leader—a man who knew something of strikes and lockouts and blacklists—I once heard him quote that verse and I then realized what an indictment it was of conditions that prevail in a large part of our industrial world today. To beg a brother of the earth for leave to toil! And yet we have those who assert the right of the few who control employment to withhold it, or to fix its absolute terms. Only recently one of the wealthy coal operators of Pennsylvania declared he held his properties by divine right, “a trustee of Providence,” and would brook no interference with them. It is the old cry of those who brooked no interference with their use of sovereign power—theirs by divine right, theirs a stewardship answerable only to God. But society sometimes will not wait for this accounting. Society sometimes appoints a receiver for incompetent trustees. Society has taken charge of political government and it may go further. And let it. Private enterprise and personal liberty are inestimable rights; but these have bounds, and these bounds are found where this freedom of personal effort permits the individual to injure and oppress society. If liberty in the economic world allows a genius to substantially monopolize the field and implements of toil—then the individual must

give way. This is justice as Burns saw it, and we recognize it everywhere but in our economic relations. We protect ourselves against the strong arm,—against military and political usurpers, but every captain of industry may, in the name of liberty, follow the career of a feudal lord and the extent of his baronial sway measures our respect for him. He and his fortune are made the text for eulogistic sermons and magazine articles. He and his fortune are treated as proof of the merit and success of our democratic institutions; and young men are started in life with these industrial conquerors as their inspiration and model.

Burns saw with Fourier the injustice that prevailed,—the idle pomp of wealth, the disrepute of toil, the stain and blot of poverty and all the misery of “age and want—that ill matched pair.” He saw it all and his eyes, like Fourier’s, were filled with tears. But Burns was not a constructive reformer. He advocated no economic remedy. He gave labor a song to sing and contented himself with a poet’s protest. He had no plea but charity,—no plan but love.

This Scottish heart was filled with Charity. Not the mere charity of alms giving. There is that something about the philanthropy of most men that suggests atonement for some previous injustice. The mortuary gifts of our multi-millionaires seem to me to speak of restitution. The very poor asylums that dot our land are monuments of social remorse. Like the hospitals that surround a battle field, they are mute witnesses of the belated consciences of men,—the love and pity and fraternity that war itself cannot extinguish in the human heart.

The Charity of Robert Burns was the kind defined by

St. Paul,—the greatest of the Christian virtues, which “beareth, believeth, hopeth and endureth all things.” This is the charity which all may practice and which, if practiced, would make the world a loving brotherhood.

Burns said :

“A man may tak his neighbor’s part  
Yet hae nae cash to spare him.”

And the Apostle declared that “though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.”

Burns knew what the heart hungered for—the charity of sympathy; and that in this commodity every man was poor in need and rich in his ability to give. He felt as the Nazarene when He wrote the woman’s sin in the forgetting sands and when He said “Ye that are sinless cast the first stone;”—the divine pity, the divine rebuke! Burns felt how much hypocrisy was in the averted eye and gathered skirts; and that the virtue even which disdained the weak was uncharitable as avarice. He felt that to understand all was to forgive much and that in the great accounting a man would be credited not so much with the good he did as with his resistance of evil and repentance thereof.

“Then gently scan your brother man,  
Still gentler, sister woman;  
Though they may gang a kennin wrang;  
To step aside is human.  
The point must still be greatly dark,  
The moving *why* they do it;  
And just as lamely can ye mark  
How far perhaps they rue it,

Who made our hearts, 'tis He alone  
Decidedly can try us;  
He knows each chord its various tone,  
Each spring its various bias;  
Then at the balance let's be mute,  
We never can adjust it;  
What's done we partly may compute,  
But never what's resisted."

Such was Robert Burns,—his life, his work, his message to humanity. He was one of Earth's weak sons, one of God's great souls; one of those who, neglected in life, speak from their sepulchres and urns.

As I have said, Burns was no reformer in the constructive sense. He founded no church, philosophy, nor economic school. He simply saw and pointed out the wrong. I believe the man who detects an ancient injustice, set in established order and disguised by vested rights, renders a greater service to mankind, than the one who, having it pointed out, offers a remedy for that wrong. Burns was of that rare type that sees through a wrong however venerable, whether it be the unchallenged cruelty of a church creed, or the undisputed injustice of a social system. He saw through all the devious paths trodden by men in search of wealth and fame and rank, the obliterated and forgotten highway of eternal right.

He was not awed by purple pomp, nor wooed by "plush repose."

Other poets might glorify the triumphs of civilization, the progress of the arts, the splendid sum of human effort. He saw beneath it all the unequal and unjust division of that splendid sum. Others might invoke the ambitions, hopes and aspirations of the individual. He wanted no man's fortune built on another's ruin. He dealt with the elemental principles of human conduct that

are, like the Golden Rule, at once fundamental and transcendent.

He was the poet-prophet of a social democracy. He was the psalmist of human brotherhood.

His mission was to call the world back from a commerce that too often hardens and a civilization that too often corrupts; to call men back to their essential kinship:—yes, back to their cosmic kinship with all created things; back to the earth with its daisy and mavis and field mice; back to the love and charity and sympathy and all the virtues that glorify the fellowship of brethren.

Some poets there are like fountains embellished by art and set in public places, where the waters flow and spurt and fall in curious mist and spray and then flow back again, while men gaze on them and admire their artificial and ingenious beauties. They are made to be admired. They do not slake the thirst. And in time the fancies of men change, the fountain is neglected, the waters cease to flow and the work is given to decay.

The poetry of Robert Burns was a spring that bubbled from the earth; that came because God sent it;—apart from public haunts, perhaps not easy of approach, whose rough grasses and green mosses might stain the knees but where men gladly kneel and drink,—a spring whose waters flow through lives made richer, by loves made sweeter, into a humanity made nobler,—a spring that shall flow and be hallowed while men have thirst.











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